

VZCZCXRO4366
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHMS #0154/01 061132Z
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 021322Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0188
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 0014
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000154

SIPDIS SIPDIS
SENSITIVE
SBU DELIBERATIVE PROCESS
EMBASSY CAIRO PASS TO THE SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-03-01
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IZ](#) [AF](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER GIVES HIS LATEST TAKE ON PALESTINIAN ISSUES

REF: a) A) STATE 14575, b) B) STATE 13997

MUSCAT 00000154 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Gary A. Grappo, Ambassador, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy - Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) Recounting his meeting in Damascus with Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi told the Ambassador February 28 that he believes Hamas is ready to agree to a renewable ceasefire and to join the political process to help achieve a final Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. Bin Alawi expressed serious concern about corruption within the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its ability to operate in Gaza, but said that Oman would likely contribute \$20-\$25 million in aid to Gaza as part of the GCC reconstruction plan. This money, however, would be earmarked for schools and clinics so as to directly benefit the Palestinian people. As demonstrated by his readiness to accommodate (but not directly support) Hamas and his rumored instigations with the Qataris, bin Alawi can at times be a thorn in our side, but his room to maneuver is limited by the architect of Oman's foreign policy - Sultan Qaboos. End Summary.

Damascus Visit

¶2. (C) During a February 28 meeting with Minister bin Alawi, the Ambassador provided an update on the mission of U.S. Special Envoy Senator George Mitchell (ref B) and the latest USG plans for the March 2 conference in Sharm al-Sheikh on Gaza reconstruction (ref A). Bin Alawi shared that during his February 2-3 visit to Damascus for talks with Syrian government officials, he also met with Khaled Meshaal and other Hamas leaders (NFI). From his discussions, he sensed that Hamas was ready to talk seriously about joining the political process. According to the Omani minister, while Hamas was not prepared to renounce violence in perpetuity until a final peace deal with Israel was achieved, it was willing to agree to a 12-18 month ceasefire - renewable for up to three years - to allow time for reaching a settlement with the Israelis that would bring an end to all hostilities. "We need to acknowledge this," remarked bin Alawi.

¶3. (C) In this context, bin Alawi stated that he was encouraged by recent reports that Hamas and the PA were starting talks, to include the formation of five working committees, to build a unity government and agree on plans for new Palestinian elections. He was confident that both parties were committed to achieving these goals.

Gaza Reconstruction

4 (C) Bin Alawi underscored Oman's serious concerns over pervasive corruption in the PA and its ability to function on the ground in Gaza. Noting that Gulf states were increasingly "fed up" with PA corruption, he stated that the reconstruction program for Gaza approved by the GCC in Riyadh on February 22 envisioned the opening of a Gaza field office to help ensure that assistance directly benefited the Palestinian people and did not end up in the hands of Hamas. He further related that Oman would likely contribute \$20-\$25 million in aid for Gaza that, consistent with the Sultanate's prior donations for Palestine, would be specifically earmarked for schools and clinics. This amount would fall short of the projected \$50 million contribution required for an Arab state to sit on the governing board/committee for the reconstruction program, bin Alawi remarked.

¶5. (C) Bin Alawi rebuffed the Ambassador's arguments that the GCC's reconstruction proposal would undermine the PA and would entail extensive preparatory efforts since neither the GCC nor the

MUSCAT 00000154 002.2 OF 002

Islamic Development Bank has a presence in Gaza. "The PA has already lost credibility and we can find consultants to administer the aid programs," offered the minister.

Comment

16. (C) The prickly bin Alawi does the U.S. no favors in meeting with Khaled Meshaal and encouraging accommodation of Hamas. His rumored machinations with the Qataris on regional issues again point to serious vacillation on bin Alawi's part. Fortunately, it is doubtful that the Omani foreign minister is taken seriously by his GCC colleagues. For us, he may no longer be a useful interlocutor on this issue. Sultan Qaboos remains the architect of the country's foreign policy and his moderate, calculated vision of Oman's role in the region ultimately limits bin Alawi's room to maneuver and any desire he may have to raise the Sultanate's (and thereby his) profile on controversial issues. An illustrative case in point is Omani aid for Gaza, which undoubtedly had to pass muster with the Sultan. The government's reported contribution of \$20-\$25 million gives Oman relevancy in reconstruction efforts and allows it to appear in step with the rest of the GCC and its domestic audience. But by being well below the figure required for a seat at the program's governing table, Oman will purposely be removed from the political squabbling that may arise as funds are administered. End Comment.
GRAPPO

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:e9a61fda-ddfa-45db-80